

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) announced today he has introduced legislation in Congress to set aside approximately 3,500 acres around the Cahaba River in Bibb County for a National Wildlife Refuge, protecting the area's natural resources and creating new recreational opportunities for fishing, hiking and nature education.

"The Cahaba River is a treasure to be protected. The approach we take will preserve it and, at the same time, let Alabamians enjoy and participate in its beauty," said Bachus. "The Cahaba River Wildlife Refuge will be a short weekend drive away for families from Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Selma and places in-between."

The proposed refuge is located in what is locally known as the Piper Bridge area, close to where the Cahaba River and Little Cahaba River meet in Bibb County, a 35-40 minute drive from downtown Birmingham. It includes the Hargrove Shoals area, which is popular among local canoe enthusiasts and is the most widely photographed stretch of the river.

"We're going to preserve the entire area and keep it clean, pristine and available for everyone to enjoy its beauty," said Bachus. "The Cahaba is a special place that deserves to be set aside for conservation. It is Alabama's heartland river. This act will make sure the Cahaba is destined to endure for the enjoyment of future generations," said Bachus.

Currently, most of the land in the area is owned by U.S. Alliance, formerly Kimberly Clark. The company owns over 2,500 acres within the boundaries of the proposed refuge. Louis Olivier with U.S. Alliance has stated the company is pleased to participate. "Alliance looks forward to this partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other participating landowners and supporters. The company appreciates Congressman Bachus for his commitment and leadership to the conservation of the Cahaba River," said Olivier. Other private land owners have said they would also sell their property to create the refuge.

Under the Bachus bill, land would be acquired for the refuge from only those willing to sell their property. Absolutely no property will be taken to create the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge.

The bill has the support of The Nature Conservancy and the Bibb County Commission.

"This project is a great example of a public/private partnership that brings business, private landowners, local citizens, the federal government and a major conservation organization together for a win-win situation that benefits our remarkable natural heritage," said Wendy Allen, Director of Protection for the Alabama Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Ray Sansing, Chair of the Bibb County Commission, said: "We believe this project is a partnership that will achieve conservation of a wonderful river while sustaining our local economy through eco-tourism benefits. We are very excited by Congressman Bachus's support of this project and are proud to be a partner in the protection of this unique natural resource. For generations, our local citizens have lived in harmony with this wonderful river, fishing, canoeing,

hunting or just enjoying its beauty. We want our great-grandchildren to share in those experiences. That's why we support this partnership."

"Once the land has been acquired and the wildlife refuge designated, hiking and bicycle trails will be built as well as a visitors center. The bill I'm introducing will allow for public use of the refuge for fishing, wildlife observation and environmental education for schools," said Bachus.

The Cahaba River is the longest free-flowing river in Alabama and is recognized nationally for its diversity. It is home to 64 rare species of plants and animals, 131 species of fish and harbors the largest population in the world of the shoals lily, known locally as the Cahaba Lily. "The Cahaba River is one of Alabama's most precious places – one of our Last Great Places. Scientists nationwide have deemed Alabama's aquatic treasures as globally important – not just locally," said Kathy Stiles Freeland, Vice President and State Director of the Alabama Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. "We Alabamians are a people with a strong connection to our natural lands and rivers. The broad-based support for this project is evidence that we clearly understand the need to protect them."